

Case Study: First Day Jitters Become First Day Disasters

It was the evening before my first day of student teaching. I was trying so hard not to let my nerves get the best of me as I ran around like a chicken with its head cut off, scrambling to put together my bag for the next day. Thoughts ran through my head as I lay in bed trying to get some sleep before I had to get up in six hours: *How will I introduce myself? How will the kids react to me? Will they like me? Or will they hate me? I hope my mentor and I develop a great relationship. What will I do if I encounter an issue with student behavior? I'm so bad at disciplining. But that's not my job as student teacher...or is it?*

The next morning, after chugging tea and getting ready in a half-awake daze, I set off to the local high school I would be interning at and stepped inside. I tried to cover up my feelings of nervousness by looking as professional as I could amongst all of the high schoolers as I made my way to the office to check in and then up to the art room. As I walked upstairs a staff member let me inside a locked door. "You aren't a student, are you?" was what I was greeted with, making me feel even less confident that I could exercise control over students who looked just like me. As I stepped inside the art room, my mentor, Ms. Walker was ready with a big smile on her face. "You ready!?", she exclaimed as I walked in. "Yep!," I responded out loud as I thought "*I think*" inside.

After settling into my new environment, the bell rang and my first block of students came in. Drawing and Painting I. *Okay*, I thought. *I've got this; I took all three levels of it and Advanced Placement in high school and this was my concentration in college.* I quickly jumped into teacher mode after the warm-up and introduction from my mentor and started to circulate and observe students at work. The second block was even better: Drawing and Painting II and III and Advanced Placement. Again I circulated the room and got to know students. I really got to know the AP students and a sense of where they were going for the future.

This is great! I thought as second block left and Ms. Walker and I got ready for lunch and our planning period. I felt like I was really able to connect with students and my relationship with my mentor was great. I met all of the other art staff and even observed the ceramics teacher during my mentor's planning period. I was ready for last block: Art I. At least I thought I was.

Fourth block— last block of the day. This was also the rowdiest block of the day with students from very diverse learning and social backgrounds. It began well. My mentor introduced me for the third time and I began to observe students as I circulated among the thirty-four students (the largest class of the day). Everything began normal just as it had during the first two periods. Then I spotted my first student, Jake, who sat at the back table, was off task, and had headphones in his ears. I approached Jake and asked him to put the ipod away. He obliged and I discussed the matter with Ms. Walker. "Oh yeah, I do NOT allow ipods or cell phones in my classroom. Thank you for handling that situation for me," she said. I felt good that I had handled my first classroom management situation well. This feeling made me confident as I found my next ipod rule abuser whose headphones were very obvious as they dangled out of the neck of his hoodie sweatshirt. I approached him and said, "You need to put those away." Unfortunately, he was not as compliant as my last student. "Why? They're off," was his response. I said, "Really? Let me see," thinking it was a normal ipod whose screen would be lit. His ipod shuffle was harder to tell, so I wasn't sure if it was on or off. I simply said, "You still need to put them away. Your teacher said you were not allowed to have ipods out during class."

"She said I could as long as it was off," he bluntly stated.

Leslie Gates 2/16/10 4:27 PM

Comment: "first" is odd here...not sure what "first" he is.

"Really?" I said, thinking this was just another student trying to pull one over on the new teacher.

"Yeah," he said, which was accompanied by another student's snappy remark that Ms. Walker said he could.

"You need to put those away," I said again.

"Fine!" he exclaimed as he got up reluctantly to put the ipod in his backpack. "Can you leave now?" he said in a nasty tone.

"Once I see you put those away in your book bag I will," I replied.

After what seemed like several minutes and an intense staring contest, the student finally put his ipod away. Taken aback by the way I was treated by the student, I talked with my mentor teacher. I told her I was receiving some attitude from students. She was surprised that the student, Terry, reacted that way. She revealed to me that she had in fact told Terry that he could have the headphones hanging out of his sweatshirt as long as they were off. "They're some sort of fashion statement, I don't know," she said at the end of our conversation. I felt very awkward and embarrassed that I probably overreacted and made a really poor first impression on Terry. I asked her why she didn't just do away with ipods all together. Her response, "I should" and just left it at that.

At the end of the day, Ms. Walker and I talked about my first day. The Terry situation came up again and she told me she wanted me to develop a good rapport with the students, not to be rule enforcer. Then in the same breath she said that when students snapped at me she did not want to interfere and wanted me to handle the situations myself. This left me even more confused as to what my role truly was in the classroom as a student teacher.

Discussion:

1. How could this scenario have been prevented?
2. How is a new and inexperienced student teacher supposed to hold authority when presented with a situation like this where the mentor does not reinforce his or her own rules?
3. How would you have handled the situation?

Leslie Gates 2/16/10 4:34 PM

Comment: I agree – this sends mixed messages.

Leslie Gates 2/16/10 4:34 PM

Comment: Some of your questions are a bit presumptuous. By that, I mean that there are some assumptions hiding in these questions such as:

- 1) the scenario could have been prevented
- 2) a new teacher is supposed to hold authority and the mentor is not enforcing the rules

I wonder some more basic questions such as, "What are my responsibilities as a student teacher on her first day?" "How can I begin a discussion with my mentor in order to get a clearer picture of what she would like me to do?" "How should I respond when a student is defiant?"

Criteria	Points	Comments
SETTING • Has the author included a clear description of setting/context for case with relevant information?	3 / 3	Lauren, Your case study captures one of the first dilemmas most new teachers experience. Some of the tension is created because you are in someone else's classroom and operating under a pre-existing set of rules and procedures. Additional tension is created when you have a confrontation with a student when you are really hoping all of the students like you. They are important things to think about and to continue questioning. Nice work.
CHARACTERS • Has the author included fictitious names for all characters/places? • Has the author included relevant dialogue between main characters? • Has the author indicated teacher thinking and actions?	3 / 3	
DILEMMA • Has the author unfolded events and revealed issues (rather than stating them)? • Has the author included at least two issues related to the art teaching dilemma? • Does the case end with an unresolved dilemma?	3 / 3	
WRITING • Has the author logically sequenced events and explained time gaps between events? • Has the author written clearly, using good grammar, spelling, and proper formatting?	3 / 3	
QUESTIONS • Has the author offered at least three questions that promote discussion around the dilemmas presented in the case?	2.5 / 3	
TOTAL POINTS		14.5 / 15